



school safety ACTION PLAN

Mike Fisher

Attorney General
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania





“We as parents, teachers and students are taking steps to ensure that our schools are safe

havens where young people can learn in an atmosphere free from conflict and violence.”

**Attorney General Mike Fisher
2000**



Office of Attorney General

To the People of Pennsylvania:

A few years ago, a series of shootings by school students swept through the nation's classrooms, cafeterias and gymnasiums, turning schools into grounds of deadly violence. Communities such as Pearl, Mississippi, Jonesboro, Arkansas and Littleton, Colorado became targets of senseless acts of death and destruction. Closer to home, we experienced our own tragedy at a school in Edinboro, Pennsylvania.

These violent tragedies have created a level of fear and anxiety among parents, students and teachers in schools across the nation and in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania's students should not have to learn in an atmosphere charged with fear.

As Pennsylvania's chief law enforcement officer, it is my top priority to ensure that Pennsylvania is a safe place in which to live. With this goal comes a responsibility to make our schools a place where our children are able to learn in a setting that is free from all threats and acts of violence. Yet I cannot accomplish this task alone.

This is why I established the Task Force on School Safety which has convened this second Summit. This Task Force brings together Pennsylvania's leaders in education, law enforcement and state government to develop policy, program and other solutions to school violence. The Task Force is divided into five working groups: Community Outreach and Involvement; School Management and Crisis Preparation; Professional Development and Instructional Issues; Law and Judiciary, and Private and Parochial Schools.

I am pleased to present the work of those five working groups, which is included in this School Safety Action Plan. This is our plan, which includes common sense ways to make our schools a place where our children are able to learn and our educators are able to teach in a setting free from all threats and acts of violence. I want to thank the distinguished men and women of the Task Force on School Safety for their diligent work on behalf of the people of this great Commonwealth.

Children learn better in schools that are free from conflict and violence. With the help of the Task Force and your help, we can ensure that Pennsylvania's schools are the safest in the nation.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Fisher".

Mike Fisher
Attorney General



The Honorable A. Leo Sereni

Former President Judge
Delaware County Court of Common Pleas

The Honorable A. Leo Sereni was elected to a 10-year term commencing January of 1990. He is a graduate of St. Joseph's University and Villanova School of Law as well as the Court Practice Institute, the National College of Advocacy and the National Judicial College.

Judge Sereni was elected President Judge Pro Tem in February of 1995 and in December 1995 was elected President Judge for a five-year term beginning January 1996.

Prior to his ascendance to the bench, Judge Sereni served as an Assistant District Attorney, a Master in Child Abuse Hearings and as solicitor for several Municipalities.

On January 2, 2000, Judge Sereni retired from the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas in order to accept the position as managing partner of the expanded suburban law offices of Dilworth Paxson LLP located in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania and to intensify his efforts as the Chairman of the Attorney General's Task Force on School Safety.

Judge Sereni is a Board Member of Lincoln University, Chester County, Pennsylvania, the Child Guidance Resource Centers of Delaware County, Pennsylvania the ARC of Delaware County, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania and the Justinian Society of Delaware County, Media, Pennsylvania.



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Taking on violence





**Community Outreach and Involvement
Working Group**
Recommendations

State's school safety task force comes to Erie

By JENNIFER PIERSON
Staff writer

General McLane High School junior Jennifer Easton wanted to talk to Pennsylvania Attorney General Mike Fisher about the graffiti in her school's bathrooms.

"People used to write phone numbers on these bathroom walls. Now it's messages of death and hatred," Easton said. "What happened to the way we were?"

Those are the answers Fisher is looking for.

His Task Force on School Safety was in Erie Monday morning to listen to people talk about school safety. The task force has 14 recommendations about what could be done to improve school safety. It is trying to hear from people about whether the recommendations are practical. This was the third public hearing they have held around the state.

Easton recommended that schools pay more attention to the small problems, such as bathroom graffiti, before they become larger problems.

Easton and Brian Hager, who also testified, were students at Parker Middle

School in Edinboro when Andrew Wurst killed science teacher John J. Gillette. Both students talked about how their views of school, the media and violence changed after that incident.

"I think that make it just a little bit harder to start the healing process," Hager said about the television cameras that were at Parker filming students after the shooting. "It's just kids walking out of school."

The 10 people who testified before the committee Monday morning were school superintendents, students, parents, journalists, and lawyers. All brought different point of view about what should be done to improve school safety.

"The high profile cases get the attention, but I can tell you it is just as hurtful for students to be intimidated and threatened," said Erie School District Superintendent James Barker.

He supported the recommendation that schools form relationships with community agencies to better help children with all their problems, not just educational ones.

But not all of the speakers agreed with

■ Please turn to TASK FORCE / 4A



ROB ENGELHARDT/Staff photographer

Dr. Paul Kettl listens to testimony Monday at the state Task Force on School Safety. Ten people testified before the committee at Gannon University.

Schools look to identify potentially violent students

By LOUIS SAHAGUN
Los Angeles Times writer

Sixteen months after the Columbian

place dangers. Others are in-depth psychological surveys developed by school districts.

is reported on campus. A team of teachers, administrators and mental-health experts then asks the student involved a list

Community Partnerships

1. Schools and communities should work together to develop initiatives designed to prevent school violence.

Explanation: School violence, and more generally, juvenile delinquency, should be a major concern for the entire community of which the school is an integral part.

Justification: This cooperation and collaboration results in many positives. The community's knowledge of the functions of the educational process, as well as education's familiarity with the issues and makeup of the community foster understanding. Partnerships will uncover common issues in the community and in the schools. Each entity will be able to tap the resources of the other, and importantly, a feeling of the school being an integral part of the community and the community being part of the school will occur.

Collaborative efforts have been successful. A primary example is school-based probation, begun in Lehigh County and now serving in most of the counties and school districts in the Commonwealth. The facts, via an independent University of Pennsylvania study, show that this community allocation partnership resulted in 40 percent fewer delinquency placements, as well as significant cost savings to the taxpayers.

Reductions in absenteeism and disciplinary referrals have also been reported. New York State has required statewide meetings on school-community collaboration (Chapter 402 of the Laws of 1997). In addition, Communities in Schools nationwide have connected community resources with students and their families at the school site.

2. Schools should make available their buildings and resources to members of the community.

Explanation: School buildings and resources should be utilized as much as possible for the benefit of the surrounding community.

Justification: School buildings and resources are certainly part of the community. Historically, non-use of school buildings and resources other than during regular school hours did not take advantage of the potential uses of physical structures, but also did nothing to help the schools and the school community integrate into the community as a whole. Using the buildings and resources for community meetings, booster club events, neighborhood meetings, and other events not only maximizes the use of the physical structure, but also brings together the school and various community groups. In addition, the use of other school resources projects a sharing atmosphere to the community as a whole and allows the school to work more positively within the community structure.

Culture of Violence

3. Schools and community leaders, including members of human services, religious institutions, businesses and corporations, and civic leaders should identify and implement after school programs designed to meet the needs of children whose families are unavailable to provide supervision during these hours.

Explanation: The time of day when children are at most risk for exposure to problem behaviors and association with peers who engage in problem behaviors are those hours immediately after school: specifically the time period from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Justification: It is universally believed that the critical time period during which children are most likely to become involved in problem behaviors, such as delinquency, violence, drug use and sexual activity are those hours immediately after school. According to a 1996 national survey and publication “Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need To Know” [Simon and Schuster] half of all adolescents in America report to not talking to both their parents everyday; Furthermore, two-thirds of parents surveyed admit to not knowing where their children are, who they are with or what they do after school at night.

Early Identification and Intervention Subcommittee

4. Schools and key community institutions should identify and then assess those risk factors which may increase the likelihood of problem behaviors among students.

Explanation: It is necessary that school staff and those staff working with children in the community are aware of the factors that contribute to inappropriate behavior in children. To understand the precursors to this inappropriate behavior is an attempt to deal with these antecedents before they result in a threat to the safety of the educational and general community. All individuals, whether they be in or out of the school setting, must be able to evaluate a child’s potential for harm to him/herself or to others as may present itself in the community.

Justification: The National School Safety Center in 1998 developed a comprehensive list of common characteristics in youngsters that could indicate a youth’s potential for harming him/herself or others. This checklist provides a starting point as a means to alert not just school staff but community institutions as well.

- Has a history of tantrums and uncontrollable angry outbursts.
- Characteristically resorts to name calling, cursing or abusive language.
- Habitually makes violent threats when angry.
- Has previously brought a weapon to school.
- Has a background of serious disciplinary problems at school and in the community.
- Has a background of drug, alcohol or other substance abuse or dependency.
- Is on the fringe of his/her peer group with few or no close friends.
- Is preoccupied with weapons, explosives or other incendiary devices.

- Has previously been truant, suspended or expelled from school.
- Displays cruelty to animals.
- Has little or no supervision and support from parents or a caring adult.
- Has witnessed or been a victim of abuse or neglect in the home.
- Has been bullied and/or bullies or intimidates peers or younger children.
- Tends to blame others for difficulties and problems s/he causes her/himself.
- Consistently prefers TV shows, movies or music expressing violent themes and acts.
- Prefers reading materials dealing with violent themes, rituals, and abuse.
- Reflects anger, frustration, and the dark side of life in school essays or writing projects.
- Is involved with a gang or an antisocial group on the fringe of peer acceptance.
- Is often depressed and/or has significant mood swings.
- Has threatened or attempted suicide.

It is incumbent on the school and community to review this list against their unique environment and edit the list to best represent their specific setting. There must be recognition of the unique nature of the particular urban, suburban, and rural settings that constitute the communities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to highlight risk factors for their youth.

5. Community organizations that work with students should be aware of risk factors for problem behaviors among students, the availability of community resources and the referral process for at risk or problem students.

Explanation: When adults are able to identify children who are either at-risk for future harm to self or others, they must know how to respond to the behavior of the child by matching the need to a community agency whose mission is to specifically work with the behavior trait assessed.

Justification: When community organizations and/or individuals are appraised of those risk factors associated with potential problem behavior, they must have knowledge and information on resources available to assist youngsters with identified characteristics. Information on who/how to contact agencies for assistance is paramount.

6. Schools must continue to expand their efforts in forming partnerships with community organizations and are encouraged to share resources.

Explanation: A student at-risk for harm to self or others is a threat not only in the school but in the total community. Consequently, to provide greater efficiencies in the terms of staffing, funding, and effort, we are able to reduce replication of services and to also provide a focused collaborative resolution to the problems.

Justification: True collaboration is the actual sharing of power and resources (staff and dollars) where both public and private agencies are held accountable for what they are responsible to provide.

The identification and increase of the at-risk population promotes no one agency to have the financial resources to meet the educational/treatment need of this population.

Adolescents between the ages of 13-21 who exhibit a continuous display of abnormal individual or social behavioral characteristics and may have a history of repeated failure in social service intervention systems are the “at-risk” identified population.

- ▶ Special needs clients - Psychiatrically identified as in need of treatment
- ▶ Dependent clients - Habitual acts of disobedience
- ▶ Delinquent clients - Adjudicated through the court system but do not require lock up
- ▶ Non-identified needs - Clients who are headed toward dependency or youth delinquency. Those who slip between the cracks.

Partnerships between private and public agencies reduce the physical, emotional, and economic resources currently utilized to combat the problem in a disjointed, detached fashion. Such relationships help create a seamless system where:

- The community is the solution, and the community includes the school.
- Assistance is easily accessed from a high quality integrated service model.
- Duplication of services is eliminated which saves effort, time, and money.
- Collaboration evidences shared goals, a commitment of resources (staff and funds), and formal written agreements.

Various partnerships include:

- County Children and Youth Department
- County Probation Department
- School Districts
- County MH/MR Agency
- State Department of Welfare
- Other Private Insurance HMOs

Programs that provide for a sharing of financial resources promote a high quality of professional services. At-risk children can be maintained in their communities with their needs being met through collaborative programs.



Media Responsibility Subcommittee

7. News organizations should exercise discretion when describing acts of the violence.

Explanation: News organizations should recognize that violent events can be and have been imitated by teens. Exact descriptions can be easily imitated by susceptible youth.

Justification: Exact descriptions of violent events can be easily imitated by susceptible youth. News reports of suicides of prominent news or entertainment personalities have been imitated causes increases in numbers of suicides in the two weeks following the event. This has been described in reports of nightly news reports of suicides, as well as the death of Bud Dwyer in Pennsylvania several years ago.

The Columbine tragedy also led to a rash of imitation bomb threats throughout Pennsylvania. Reports to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Association showed 354 threats of school violence in the fifty days after the Columbine massacre, far exceeding the one to two threats per year estimated by school administrators prior to 1999.

Violent acts can be easily imitated. News reports of these events should not exactly describe it in the way it could be easily copied. News organizations have already decided to exercise such discretion in sexual assault of youngsters, and should make a similar decision in physical assault as well.

8. School districts, law enforcement and local media should have an established protocol or plan for the release of information in the event of a school crisis.

Explanation: The fundamental responsibility of these organizations is care of children. Information for the media about any violent event occurring at these facilities should be obtained through scheduled press conferences. Media should not expect full access to schools, or any other care facility for children. Schools should also understand the importance of public information and the right of the media to report.

Justification: The Center of Disease Control recommends that this occurs after youth suicide. It is just as appropriate to have an established plan in place after any school crisis. In a crisis, school personnel are quite busy, and the emotional and work demands in such a situation can be overwhelming. Having a plan in place to manage the media can assist in the management of the crisis.

Moreover, students who experienced the media onslaught in Edinboro, PA after a teacher was killed felt that the excess media presence amplified and prolonged the grief process.

9. Schools and media groups should form partnerships to provide education for children about the proper use of media entertainment, and the effects of that media exposure on their development.

Explanation: Children spend more time watching TV than any other waking activity. The media, including not only television, but home video, the internet, and video games represent a Substantial experience and exposure of violence for our children. They should learn how to manage this potent influence in their lives. The media has already recognized their responsibility to educate children about the media. NBC, MTV and CBS, among others, have already taken action.

Justification: Violence in entertainment programming should not be gratuitous. Depictions of violence in entertainment programming should include in the story: the reason why violence was chosen as an action by the perpetrator, depiction of the pain inflicted on the victim, the effects of the violent action on the perpetrator and the victim as well as their families.

Parental Responsibility Subcommittee

10. School districts should involve parents in the design and implementation of school safety policies and programs.

Explanation: Parents have the key role in the upbringing of their children. Inviting parents to be part of the decision-making process in the school, such as development of school safety policies, will resolve problems involving discipline, order and safety. Although research shows that both parents and educators agree on the importance of including parents in the educational process, the agreement often breaks down when it comes to implementing a parent involvement program. While parents may want to volunteer for positions that range from classroom assistant to decision maker, many educators tend to encourage only the more traditional volunteer roles, such as fund-raisers or audience participants at school functions. The greater the participation of parents in the decision making process, the more powerful will be the message to students that education and safety are important and serious matters.

Justification: “Schools cannot meet the challenge of reform without first doing a better job of connecting with parents and the public.” (Listen First, Educational Leaderships Vol. 55 #8, May 1998, page 25, Ron Brandt). Tom Sergiovanni further states that parents and teachers should be cooperative decision makers at all levels of student learning and policy making because that is “the essence of a democratic community and because the give and take of such decisions is what procedure understanding and trust.” (Page 27, Listen First, Ed. Leaderships Vol. 55 #8, May 1998). Often parent/school discussion and the resulting policy decisions that are formulated need to be based on the common beliefs of schools, parents and community. How the school district achieves standards of safety needs to be jointly arrived at by all stakeholders, Richard E Berry, superintendent, Houston, Texas stated that “our district initiated a safety task force involving parents, students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community members to enhance our plan for safety and crisis management. It works.” (A Guide to Safe Schools, page 24, U.S. Department of Education 1998).

11. Schools and parents should jointly develop strategies for effective communication.

Explanation: Communicating policies to all parents is paramount to the success of any program, even more so in the prevention of school violence. While discipline policies can be printed and distributed to parents, reliance on the media to convey facts regarding school emergencies is disturbing to parents. Often the information provided by students is not reliable, and parents are forced to wait for media releases to understand a school emergency. Volunteer phone trees, e-mail messages, and telephones in classrooms can provide adequate access for effective communication with parents and the community.

Justification: Using approaches and strategies based on research about works, effective schools create a violence prevention and response plan through a team effort. This plan reflects the “common and unique needs of students, families, educators and the greater community.” (A guide to Safe Schools U.S. Department of Education) The Assembly Institute for School Reform evaluated efforts of parent/community public engagement and concluded: “the process of bringing people together – talking, listening, developing a shared vision and creating a plan of action in and of itself. It brings new purpose into conversation and decision making around schools. It builds trust in goodwill and it expands the capacity of the community to undertake effective problem solving and to bring additional resources to bear.” (Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change 1998)

12. Schools should form partnerships with other community institutions such as 1. human service providers, 2. religious institutions, 3. civic and volunteer organizations to identify opportunities for effective parenting skill development.

Explanation: When effective and meaningful parent education programs are provided, parents can consciously assume their responsibility and foster the development of a good value system in their children. Through school and community groups, school administrators have the opportunity to provide parent education programs that teach parenting skills for children of all age levels and provide information about development stages and milestones from infancy through the high school years. Critical TV viewing, firearm safety, conflict resolution skills, availability of community and family services, and safeguarding children in home, schools, and communities are some topics that encourage active parent and community involvement.

Justification: Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development requires collaboration between all stakeholders. As Robyn Crago, President of the McDonnell High had stated in her testimony in Erie, “Schools with community groups can provide parenting skills courses that include information on conflict problem solving and anger management.” Programs that fund and jointly manage delinquency efforts include After School Support programs, School-Based Probation, delinquency prevention programs and S.A.P. Family Service System Reform and Pre-School programs are also effective school/community interventions. According to Thomas J. Gamble Ph.D., “those programs have resulted from local leaderships unwilling to work together to solve problems.” Gamble strongly supports the implementation of proven programs aimed at improving parenting and providing after school programming.

13. Schools should provide every opportunity to schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of the parent, including evening hours when necessary. Likewise, parents should recognize their obligation to attend.

Explanation: Parent-teacher conferences are often scheduled at the convenience of the school calendar. Seldom does the scheduling take into account the working parent. Late afternoon and early evening conferences can enhance the success rate of attendance by parents at the conference, especially from single-parent households. The site of the conference should also be considered. Perhaps a meeting at a community center or in the family home would contribute to success.

Justification: In Ron Brandt’s article Listen First he states that “Schools cannot meet the challenges first doing a better job of connecting parents and the public.” Communication is the essence of the student-teacher-parent matrix and needs to be fostered and encouraged at any opportunity. Ronald Reyer, Superintendent of the Penncrest School District testified at the Community Outreach and Involvement Public Hearing, that parent conferencing and communicating in this school district receives paramount attention. The district staff makes accommodations for parents attendance by providing for teacher accessibility, parent transportation child care and video conferencing. A variety of conference time slots are offered as well as sight options such as home visits by the staff. Mr. Reyer also commented on the parent responsibility to attend conferences.

14. The Pennsylvania General Assembly should increase parental liability for the delinquent acts of their children.

Explanation: “In an era where there appears to be little parental accountability and/or an acceptance of responsibility for the violent behavior of their children, we must be extremely careful not to unjustly punish parents for the torts of their children. That is not to say that, under circumstances, a parent should not be held civilly liable for the torts committed by their children.” Bradley Foulk, District Attorney Erie County

Justification: “Without question parents who act negligently and/or irresponsibly should be held civilly responsible if that conduct results in torts conducted by their children.” Bradley Foulk, District Attorney Erie County





**Law and Judiciary
Working Group**
Recommendations



Juvenile Court / School Relations Subcommittee

1. The President Judge or the Juvenile Court Administrative Judge in each judicial district should ensure that the juvenile probation department is complying with Juvenile Act requirements to provide information regarding delinquent children to school building principals.

Explanation: Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act requires courts to provide the following information to the building principal, or his or her designee, of any public, private or parochial school: the name and address of the child; the delinquent act or acts which the child committed; a brief description of the delinquent act or acts; and the disposition of the case.

Justification: According to the statewide survey of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, 7% of respondents do not comply with the Juvenile Act requirement to provide this information to schools.

2. School building principals should develop policies to ensure that teachers of children who have been adjudicated delinquent are notified of information that is received from the juvenile probation department regarding these children.

Explanation: Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act requires the building principal, or his or her designee, to inform the child's teacher of all information received from the juvenile probation department.

Justification: According to the statewide survey of school superintendents, 18% of urban, 8% of suburban and 9% of rural school districts reported that teachers are not notified of this juvenile delinquency information.

3. Chief Juvenile Probation Officers or designees should meet no less than annually with high school and middle school principals from their respective jurisdictions to address issues related to school safety, juvenile court policy and other issues of mutual interest.

Explanation: It is essential for juvenile court and school officials to have a common understanding of their respective policies, issues and concerns.

Justification: According to the statewide survey of school superintendents conducted in conjunction with this study, school officials reported that they meet with representatives from juvenile probation, law enforcement, the district attorney's office and "other" entities with varying frequency. Although 52% of respondents reported that they already meet at least monthly with local juvenile probation officials, their meetings do not necessarily involve the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer.

4. The Juvenile Act should be amended to require Courts to order a psychological evaluation in all cases where a child is determined to have committed a violation of 18 Pa. C.S.A. § 912 (relating to possession of a weapon on school property) when the weapon is a firearm or explosive device, and to consider the results of any such evaluation prior to entering an order of disposition in these cases.

Explanation: Juvenile court judges should consider the results of a psychological evaluation prior to making a disposition regarding a child who possesses a firearm or explosive device on school property.



This evaluation should be performed by a licensed psychologist, who should also speak with school officials, police, juvenile court personnel and the child's family. The evaluation should result in a comprehensive assessment of the youth, including the assessment of the adolescent's potential for violence. Recommendations should address both public safety and treatment considerations.

Juvenile Courts should be provided with funding through the county children and youth needs-based budget process to support these assessments. Judges should receive training on the interpretation and use of psychological evaluations, and psychologists should receive training on how to conduct these assessments.

Justification: Juvenile court judges should attempt to develop an understanding of the factors contributing to a child's behavior before making depositions. This is particularly important in cases involving the possession of a firearm or explosive device on school property. In these cases, a comprehensive psychological evaluation is essential.

5. Title 18 Pa.C.S.A. § 912 (relating to possession of a weapon on school property) should be revised in the following manner: *A. The section should be amended to make bringing a firearm onto school property a felony of the third degree for individuals who do not possess or are ineligible to possess a license under 18 Pa.C.S.A. § 6109. B. The definition of "weapon" contained in section 18 Pa. C.S.A Sec. 912 should be narrowed. C. The statute should contain a clear exemption for law enforcement, district attorneys and judicial officers who are otherwise licensed to carry a firearm.*

Explanation: Currently a person commits a misdemeanor of the first degree if he possesses a weapon on school property. This grading is not sufficient when the weapon is a firearm. A "weapon", as defined at 18 Pa. C.S. §912, includes a "knife, cutting instrument, cutting tool, nunchuck stick, firearm, shotgun, rifle and any other tool, instrument or implement capable of inflicting serious bodily injury." This definition has proven to be overly broad. In addition, the statute does not currently contain any exemption for law enforcement officers, district attorneys, or judicial officers who are otherwise licensed to carry a firearm.

Justification: The potential for tragedy is so great when a firearm is brought onto school property, that a grading higher than for incidents involving other types of weapons is warranted. If graded as a felony, children charged with possessing a firearm on school property could be subject to transfer for criminal court prosecution.

School-Based Resources

6. Juvenile Courts should assess the need for additional school-based probation programming in consultation with local school districts.

Explanation: School-based probation officers can provide intensive supervision to juveniles on their caseloads and facilitate communication between juvenile court and school officials, thereby enhancing school safety.

Justification: According to the statewide survey of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, 87% of Pennsylvania's Chief Juvenile Probation Officers who have school-based probation programs believe that school-based probation programs should be encouraged as a school safety strategy. According to the statewide survey of school superintendents, the majority of school superintendents that participate in school-based probation programs believe the programs to be effective in achieving their intended purpose.

7. Prior to implementing a school-based probation program, a written agreement between the Juvenile Court and the school should be developed to set forth clear expectations regarding the goals and operation of the program and related issues.

Explanation: A written agreement can help to ensure that the Juvenile Court and participating school share a common understanding of the purpose and goals of the program.

Justification: The results of separate surveys of chief juvenile probation officers and school superintendents indicate that chief juvenile probation officers were more likely than school officials to rate existing school-based programs as "very effective" in achieving their intended purpose. The Law and Judiciary Working Group concluded that these data suggest that Courts and schools could have different expectations of school-based probation programs.

The Juvenile Court Judges' Commission's "*Standards Governing School-based Probation Programs*" require that such written agreements include the following: a clear definition of the role of the school-based probation officers; the provision of office space within the school for the school-based probation officers that ensures confidentiality; the development of a plan that ensures access to the full range of student support services available within the school for students participating in the program, and which provides for the school-based probation officers to participate as members of the Student Assistance Program Teams and other appropriate committees designed to address student problems and needs; provisions for regularly scheduled meetings between the school and probation department administrators to discuss program issues; and, assured access to school records of students on probation to establish baseline measures on which to evaluate program impact.

8. Chief juvenile probation officers should meet at least annually with the principals of school buildings with school-based probation programs to discuss the program and related issues.

Explanation: It is essential for juvenile court and school officials to have a mutual understanding of their respective policies, issues and goals.

Justification: According to the statewide survey of chief juvenile probation officers, the most common approach to strengthening relationships was to hold regular meetings with school officials. According to the statewide survey of school superintendents, over 50% of school districts reported meeting at least monthly with juvenile probation officials to discuss issues of mutual interest.

9. All school districts should assess the degree to which new or expanded after-school programs are needed in their communities.

Explanation: Parents of 1.2 million Pennsylvania children are in the work force. Many children, particularly those in middle school and high school, are unsupervised during non-school hours. Research shows that structured after-school programs provide children with a safe environment and also deter juvenile crime. Juvenile crime rates peak during the hours of 3 – 8 PM. Quality after-school programs have proven to improve school attendance rates, decrease drop-out rates and improve students' academic performance. As part of a school safety plan, school districts and communities must focus not only on what happens during school, but also on what is happening with Pennsylvania's youth during non-school hours.

Justification: While many school districts and communities offer after-school programs, many communities lack adequate after-school activities for their children. Many school buildings remain empty during non-school hours. Many non-profit organizations that provide after-school programs indicate that they maintain a waiting list and need to expand their programs, but are unable because of a lack of funding. Many rural areas struggle with transportation difficulties. Programs in all areas of the state struggle to retain staff, find adequate facilities and rely upon inconsistent funding sources.

10. The Governor should convene an inter-departmental work group to determine how available resources can best be utilized to support after-school programs and whether additional resources may be required.

Explanation: Various state and federal funding resources currently exist for after-school programming. However, there is no single point of contact for individuals seeking to learn about, or apply for, funding to support after-school programs. After-school program directors report the lack of a consistent and stable funding source as a barrier to program service delivery and program expansion.

Justification: Adequate funding of after-school programs is critical to the provision of quality after-school programming for Pennsylvania's youth. After school programs are an important component of a school and community safety plan. Pennsylvania should ensure that sufficient funding is available to enable communities so they can offer quality after-school programs, and how to access the financial resources available to support these programs.

Law Enforcement / School Relationships

11. Local law enforcement agencies and school districts should adopt and support policies and the allocation of resources that encourage and enhance greater cooperation.

Explanation: While there is an on-going need for law enforcement to maintain a traditional investigatory and prosecutorial role in the schools, the visible presence of police on school property is not enough to prevent violence and promote safe learning environments. Working together, local law enforcement and school districts can share resources and information, which ultimately results in enhanced climates of safety and reductions in incidents of violence and other crimes.

Justification: At the heart of this recommendation is the fact that police and school administrators share the responsibility of creating and maintaining safe school environments. There are no clear boundaries between schools and communities and the activities within one environment inevitably spill over into the other. With mutual goals and unique knowledge bases and resources, the partnership of these two entities will lead to better solutions and greater confidence in the safety planning efforts, including civic leaders, parents and service providers. In addition to crisis response, school entities' efforts to develop policies and procedures to protect the safety and well-being of its students and staff will be all the more enhanced by the expertise and commitment of resources of these partners.

12. Local law enforcement agencies and school districts should consider the adoption of a school resource officer program as an integral element of a comprehensive school safety plan.

Explanation: According to the Center of Prevention of School Violence, School Resource Officers ("SROs") are officers who apply a community policing philosophy within a school environment. Community oriented policing is proactive, solution-based and community driven. It creates an environment in which true partnerships between the community and law enforcement can thrive. For a School Resource Officer, the schools are their assigned "beats." School Resource Officers are trained to perform three specific roles in the schools to which they are assigned: law enforcement; law related counseling; and law related education. In addition, Pennsylvania SROs fulfill an important function as mentors and role models for the students with who they interact.

The goal of placing an SRO in a school is to make that school more orderly, safe and secure.

Justification: A two-year evaluation of the School Resource Officer initiative in Pennsylvania is being finalized. It is anticipated that the report from this study will be available through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency later this fall and will provide data to support the positive impacts of School Resources Officers on school safety.

With respect to the issue of whether law enforcement is fulfilling a prevention role in Pennsylvania schools, the survey results indicate that most school entities do not have law enforcement providing crime prevention services (other than D.A.R.E) in the schools on a regular basis. Five (5%) percent of the respondents indicated that they employ a School Resource Officer. It is anticipated that with the release of the evaluation report of the PCCD initiative in the fall of 200, such data clearly support the continuation of the SRO initiative. At present, strong and convincing anecdotal information clearly

supports this committee's position that these dedicated police officers are impacting for the better the decline of school violence and disruptions that have plagued schools in the Commonwealth for too long.

Because the School Resource Officer program embodies the best theories of violence prevention by supporting collaborative partnerships between schools, law enforcement and the community, the committee supports the continued and expanded implementation of the program in more schools throughout Pennsylvania. In addition, in order to support this approach, the commitment of additional resources must be made to fund schools in need of this vital resource.

13. The General Assembly should strengthen the Safe Schools Act to require that all local law enforcement agencies and public schools to have a Memorandum of Understanding that is reviewed and re-executed at least every three years.

Explanation: The Safe Schools Act, 24 Pa. S. Section 13-1303-A (c), requires all Pennsylvania school entities to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement within whose jurisdiction their school buildings lie. The MOU must set forth procedures to be followed when an incident involving an act of violence or possession of a weapon by any person occurs in school property. While most school entities currently have an MOU in place, 1% of the survey respondents report that they do not yet have one. This is one aspect of the MOU requirement that must be addressed—full compliance. The more salient issue, however, is the actual content of the MOU.

Justification: School entities were queried in the survey as to the overall impact of the MOU on their safety environment. In general, respondents had an overall favorable response to the impact of their school's MOU on the safety of their environment. [Question 2] Seventy-two (72%) percent of respondents believed that the document resulted in better communication between police and the school community and resulted in feelings of greater safety.

Currently, the Pennsylvania Department of Education provides a "model" MOU in its Basic Education Circular 24 Pa. S. Section 13-1317.2. Two issues arise with this "model." First, it provides only a skeleton format for the various types of issues and incidents that should be considered when law enforcement and schools determine the types of incidents to which law enforcement will respond. Secondly, the MOU, as it is laid out, encourages a "fill in the blank" approach, which discourages schools and law enforcement from going through the process of developing an effective working agreement. A stronger and more comprehensive model with supporting training and an implementation manual will serve to guide parties through the process of developing an agreement that will offer maximum benefit and support to all entities that co-sign.

It is further recommended that the parties to the MOU document review it at least once every three years. As circumstances, staff and resources change, so must the MOU be reviewed to keep pace with these changes and varying needs of the schools served by the agreement.

14. *The Pennsylvania Department of Education should provide training and technical assistance to school entities regarding the exchange of information between law enforcement and schools.*

Explanation: While there is widespread consensus that the exchange of information between school entities and local law enforcement is critically important and beneficial to all involved, such an exchange is significantly hampered by complex web of state and federal legislation. Penalties for violation of these laws are high, including a loss of federal funding to schools.

Justification: Currently, the Pennsylvania Department of Education provides statewide training or detailed guidance related to the laws and regulations governing the exchange of information. This type of training would be beneficial to school entities as well as law enforcement that ensures the safety of students and staff and providers who offer services to students and others pursuant to the many violence prevention initiatives funded by the department. The Center for Schools and Communities, the Department's contractor for training and technical assistance for many of these prevention initiatives, has the capacity to provide this training. By expanding the contract and work plan to incorporate such training, the Department can offer important information to its customers about the need and feasibility of information exchange between law enforcement and school entities.

15. *The United States Congress and the Pennsylvania General Assembly should examine the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA), Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act and other state laws relating to the exchange of information between law enforcement and school entities to determine whether unnecessary barriers exist.*

Explanation: The committee started with the recognition that to provide adequately for student and staff safety, it is incumbent upon school administrators, local law enforcement and the juvenile justice system to exchange information on certain activities and individuals that pose a potential threat to the school and/or community. Within this framework, it is also recognized that there are important protections to student/juvenile privacy enacted by both federal and state legislatures. The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (commonly known as FERPA) set forth guidelines as to what information from a student's educational records can be shared without prior parental consent. The actual and perceived severity of the restrictions and the consequences for violation of the federal law, were anticipated to be possible impediments to the necessary sharing of information. Similarly, Appendix A to Chapter 12 of the State Board of Education regulations provides similar but not always consistent protections of students' privacy.

In addition, Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act establishes restrictions on the dissemination of information relating to cases and individuals, and does not contain express authorization for police or courts to share investigative or status information with school officials, who may have parallel investigations and disciplinary proceedings underway. The lack of such express authority has lead police, district attorneys and court personnel in some counties to believe that the Juvenile Act precludes such sharing of information, including even the testimony of investigating police officers at school disciplinary hearings.

The committee examined the issue of whether the combination of state and federal law had a chilling effect on parties working with similar students sharing vital information to protect the safety of the students and staff in the schools.

Justification: This committee investigated the issue of whether there were barriers to the open exchange of information between schools and law enforcement. Respondent school entities do not, for the most part, perceive barriers to the exchange of information related to school safety incidents between schools and law enforcement. [Question 3]

Despite respondents' consensus that barriers do not typically impede the exchange of information, this is an area of violence prevention that should not be overlooked. Schools and law enforcement must explore the channels that are already available to them to share critical information. Training and technical assistance should be provided to both law enforcement and school officials to promote greater understanding of the available channels and actual limits of applicable laws. Where barriers exist, these groups must be encouraged and supported in their efforts to overcome them through whatever legal channels are available including legislation. Based upon the responses to the survey, there are clearly areas for improvement. Police response can be improved. The political climate can be massaged and infused with information as to why information sharing is important. At the same time, the General Assembly and federal government should be lobbied to evaluate the current law and the barriers it creates to sharing information, while maintaining a critical balance with the protection of individual student rights to privacy. The Pennsylvania Department of Education can also play a vital role in assisting school entities and law enforcement in working within the bounds of existing law to support one another through lawful information exchange that still preserves the privacy of students and their families.

16. The General Assembly should address deficiencies in the Safe Schools Act relative to the requirements governing schools' reporting of acts of violence and weapons possession to law enforcement and the Department of Education.

Explanation: "Weapon" is defined at, 24 Pa. S. Section 13-1301-A as "any knife, cutting instrument, cutting tool, nunchaku, firearm, shotgun, rifle and any other tool, instrument or implement capable of inflicting serious bodily harm." The chief concern for this definition is that it is inconsistent with the definitions found in the Pennsylvania Crimes Code, Title 18 of the Pennsylvania Statutes. The inconsistencies give rise to frequent confusion with the definitions in the process of deciding what is reported to law enforcement and what is reported to Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The definition of "act of violence" is not provided by statute, but is set forth in the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Basic Education Circular (BEC) number 24 Pa. S. Section 13-1317.2. This BEC, pertaining to Safe Schools and Possession of Weapons, offers a model Memorandum of Understanding, into which all school entities and local law enforcement entities pursuant to 24 Pa. S. 13-1303 A (c). Section II A of the model Memorandum of Understanding defines "act of violence" as "Any deliberate act, serving no legitimate purpose, which causes injury or which could reasonably be expected to cause injury to another person." The model continues by stating that "To be considered reportable, the conduct should be either intentional or reckless in nature." Further, it is offered that "Many factors may be taken into consideration when determining whether it is appropriate to notify law enforcement, including: (1) Motivation (2) Actor (3) Victim (4) Potential for actual injury (5) Potential escalation (6) Parental request for law enforcement involvement."

In fact, a review of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's *Annual Report on School Violence and Weapons Possession* indicates that the lack of clear definitions has lead to inconsistent reports from one reporting entity to the next. The 1997-98 Annual Report published by the Department in July 1999 states: "data on acts of violence should be used to compare one district with another. Each school district, IU, charter school, and AVTS determines its own threshold for reporting incidents of violence. This policy is consistent with the school policies on discipline, where each school district establishes its own list of infractions and the sanctions imposed for each"

Justification: The committee collected information on the school entities' perception of the accuracy of the reports to the Pennsylvania Department of Education on school violence and weapons possession. Survey respondents overwhelmingly believe that the PDE 360 reports are accurate reflections of the level of school violence in their respective districts. [Question 4]

For those who did the report that the PDE 360 reports do not accurately reflect the level of violence in their school entities, the prevailing sense was that the definitions were too vague and subject to different interpretations by different schools. Schools are also looking for more concrete examples of reportable incidents to assist in the completion of the annual reports. Respondents also commented that the requirement to report tobacco use should be eliminated, as it is not a violent act.

The survey also sought to investigate how school entities were defining "act of violence" for reporting purposes. Based upon this data, it can be concluded that definitions need to be clarified and consolidated and that there should be less room for interpretation in order to derive data that is both useful and reliable for accurate needs assessment and resource allocation.

Truancy Subcommittee

17. The General Assembly should examine state laws governing enforcement of compulsory attendance requirements including the definitions of "truancy."

Explanation: In order to fully comprehend and understand the scope of the truancy issue in Pennsylvania, the General Assembly needs to review state laws which govern student attendance.

Justification: "The Public School Code of 1949" defines the term "habitual truancy." However, there remains a need for clarification or guidance to school districts in applying that definition and how it relates to other laws. The greatest confusion seems to be around what happens after the first notice is served to a student or parent. Does the student have to be illegally absent for one more day or three more days or is the threshold 10 consecutive days before being considered habitually truant?

There are other areas of the law that need to be examined as well. For instance, the responsibility to take daily attendance is with the classroom teacher. The School Code does not specifically require school districts to report or maintain daily attendance records. However, there are other requirements placed upon school districts for reporting their average daily membership in order to receive state and federal reimbursements.

18. *The Department of Education should improve the completeness and accuracy of truancy data and make the information about truancy rates part of school profiles.*

Explanation: Currently, the Department of Education does not gather data on student truancy. However, the Pennsylvania Department of Education reports through the use of school profiles, the school district “Attendance Rate”. The “Attendance Rate” is calculated by dividing the Aggregate Days Attendance (ADA) by the Aggregate Days Membership (ADM). While this information may be useful as an indicator of overall student attendance, it does not clearly depict the number of students who have been referred to the courts or county children and youth services.

Justification: The “Public School Code of 1949” states that every child of compulsory school age (8-17 years) is required to attend school and that every parent, guardian or other person having control or charge of any child of compulsory school age is required to send their child or children to school. The Code also sets forth the penalties for violation of compulsory attendance requirements. As defined in the Code, “habitually truant” means the absence for more than three (3) school days or their equivalent, following the first notice of truancy given under Section 1354. Section 1354 requires that the principal or teacher of a public school report immediately to the attendance officer, district superintendent or secretary of the board of school directors, the names of all children who have not appeared for enrollment, or who have withdrawn from school or who have been absent three days, or their equivalent, without a lawful excuse. Designated school personnel are then required to serve upon the parent, guardian or other person in parental relation written notice of noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws. If the student is unlawfully absent for three days or their equivalent after the district has already given written notice, the designated school personnel are required to proceed against the offending person.

19. *The President Judge or designee of each judicial district should develop or review county-wide truancy protocols in consultation with the minor judiciary, school districts and county children and youth agencies.*

Explanation: Whenever possible, a countywide truancy protocol should be developed that provides guidance to the juvenile court, minor judiciary, schools and county children and youth agencies. County President Judges, by virtue of their administrative authority relating to the minor judiciary and jurisdictional authority in dependency matters under the Juvenile Act, are uniquely positioned to convene the necessary parties to develop a countywide protocol.

Justification: The policies of individual school districts vary with regard to how and when habitually truant students will be referred to the minor judiciary or the county children and youth agency. Some school districts choose not proceed against the student until he/she is unlawfully absent 10 days or more. Yet, others may adhere to stricter guidelines. Most school districts will employ local remedies such as counseling, attendance contracts, assessment by the student assistance programs, instructional support, or assignment to alternative education classes before proceeding against the student. In many school districts, it is not until the student has demonstrated a pattern of chronic absenteeism, perhaps as much as 20-30 days of being unlawfully absent, that students are referred to the minor judiciary or children and youth agencies.

20. *The General Assembly and the Department of Education should examine the relationship between attendance rates and school-funding formulas.*

Explanation: The General Assembly and the Department of Education should examine school funding formulas and school performance grants to determine whether there are financial incentives or disincentives for school districts to report and/or address truancy matters

Justification: Any school funding formula or program designed to ensure or improve student attendance should be examined to determine its effectiveness. For instance:

School Funding—According to the Auditor General, state law (22 Pa Code, Chapter 11, Sec. 11.24) requires that active students who miss more than 10 consecutive school days without a legal excuse, or the district's pursuit of compulsory attendance prosecution, should be removed from district membership rolls. Recently, an audit of the Philadelphia School District was published for the years 1993-94 through 1995-96 which indicated that the district filed pupil membership report that included 24,054 students who were absent from school in excess of 10 consecutive days. In addition, the district claimed reimbursement for 14,605 days of membership for students who never attended the schools that claimed to have enrolled them. These actions resulted in \$20.4 million basic education subsidy overpayment.

School Performance Funding—The Department of Education, through its performance incentive grants, rewards school districts for increasing their student academic performance and attendance rates. Since 1998, the Department has awarded over \$1,150,000.00 to 15 school districts and 4 area vocational technical schools based on improved attendance. Attendance awards are determined by comparing the school's baseline attendance rate (average daily attendance/ average daily membership) to its 1999 school year attendance rate. Schools that have 1) previously provided attendance rate baseline information, 2) submitted their 1999 attendance information in a timely manner, and 3) have their enrollment data on the Department's data base were eligible for an attendance award. A minimum threshold of at least .75 percent attendance rate self-improvement from the baseline is needed for a school to attain this type of award.

21. *The Department of Public Welfare should require county children and youth agencies to report the status of each referral for habitual truancy. These status reports should be made to the referring school district and/or Minor Judiciary within 30 days of the referral. Summary statistical reports should be made to the juvenile court and the county commissioners monthly and to the Department of Public Welfare annually.*

Explanation: School districts or district justices who refer habitually truant students to the county children and youth agencies should be notified of the outcome or status of every truancy referral. This kind of data would give juvenile courts, county commissioners and state policymakers a more accurate account of student truancy rates for each county and the state. Currently, the Department of Education reports on school district attendance rates, not truancy.

Justification: Act 29 of 1995 requires that for any child who has not attained the age of thirteen years and who fails to comply with the compulsory attendance requirements and is habitually truant must be referred by the school district for services or possible disposition as a dependent child. There was

general consensus that this course of action would be more appropriate for a younger student than imposing a fine. Likewise, any child who has attained the age of thirteen years and who fails to pay a fine levied by a district justice or to comply with an adjudication alternative program, may be alleged to be a dependent child. Policymakers hoped that these changes would equip school districts and district justices with better resources to handle truancy matters. However, it has been the experience of some school districts and judges that truancy referrals are not acted upon or given priority by children county and youth agencies. This has caused some school districts to stop referring students to county children and youth agencies because they feel there is no value in doing so.

22. The Department of Education pursuant to Public School Code Sec. 1338.2 should develop recommendations for the General Assembly concerning the establishment and funding of community-based truancy prevention programs.

Explanation: Act 29 of 1995 amended the Public School Code to require the Department of Education to formulate recommendations for the General Assembly concerning the establishment and funding of effective community based anti-truancy pilot programs. In doing so, the Department of Education is required to seek advice and counsel of educators, parents, students, district attorneys, law enforcement representatives, attendance officers, social service agencies, counselors, judges, probation officers and representatives from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission.

Justification: To date, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has not convened interested parties or issued any recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the establishment and funding of truancy prevention pilot programs.

Student urges cooperation at hearing on school safety

By BRIAN McDONALD
FOR THE PATRIOT-NEWS

Sitting before a state panel considering ways to improve

Pelfer focused his comments on a recommendation that urges local law enforcement and school districts to adopt

Panel highlights
A state task force looking at ways to make schools safer has offered recommendations that include:
Chief juvenile probation officers





School Management and Crisis Preparation
Working Group
Recommendations

State attorney general seeks input on how to curb school violence

By Bonnie Adams
Times-Herald News Writer

The state's top prosecutor sought Neil Grimes' input Wednesday because he saw school violence from a teen's perspective.

The 16-year-old attends a Wilkes-Barre high school in which several fellow students brought guns last year.

He was the first to testify in a lineup of 30 seasoned law-enforcement officials, school professionals and a congressman.

Attorney General Mike Fisher and a seven-member panel considered proposed recommendations to prevent school violence.

The issue referred to last year's

The GAN Memorial High School senior supports enacting everyone in preventing school violence. He suggested school safety conventions be formed in include the typical community and school officials. But he would also involve juveniles on probation.

"You want to know why they turned bad," he said. "How'd they do things differently?"

In the audience was his high school principal, Teresa McGuire, who had asked him to address the panel during the public hearing at Montywood University. "He feels strongly about the safety issue," she said. "We need to listen to students."

His father, Tom Grimes, also testified. "I think what he's saying

"I think we have to make sure that students have a voice," Wednesday's school management and crisis preparation published throughout the state. Fisher's Task Force on School Safety has proposed recommendations for school discipline, violence prevention, zero tolerance, crisis management and alternative education.

"He and I agree on a lot of things," U.S. Rep. Dan Shroyer said of Grimes. The 20th District congressman testified on behalf of amending the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to adopt a consistent policy for disciplining all children who bring weapons to school.

swearing that weapons are not tolerated in our schools," he said. Jacques Petherick, president of the Scranton Federation of Teachers, spoke in support of regional alternative schools to provide counseling and education for students with emotional and behavioral problems.

the last resort and suggests school districts use a multi-tiered system of intervention. Petherick said that if a student is not responding to intervention, the district should consider alternative schools.



Legal Problems / School Discipline

1. Congress should amend IDEA to modify the dual system of discipline mandated by current law.

Explanation: All students should be expected to comply with reasonable rules of conduct. If a student with a disability needs to be subject to special rules or consequences for breaching rules, this should be addressed as part of the student's individualized education program. This shifts the focus from discipline after an incident to increased behavior prevention planning as part of the IEP process. If no special discipline is addressed in the IEP, the student would be subject to all regular rules of the school.

Justification: IDEA hinders a school district's ability to apply discipline to a student for behavior that is manifestation of his or her disability. School staff do not know how to address the misbehavior of students with disabilities. The recommended change would clarify the obligations and responsibilities of students and school officials.

2. Congress should amend IDEA to ensure that students who exhibit violence or threaten violence, even if they are not in possession of weapons or drugs, can be promptly removed, if necessary, to an alternative educational setting until permanent change in program or placement can be considered.

Explanation: All students should be expected to comply with reasonable rules of conduct. If a student with a disability needs to be subject to special rules or consequences for breaching rules, this should be addressed as part of the student's individualized education program. This shifts the focus from discipline after an incident to increased behavior prevention program. If no special discipline is addressed in the IEP, the student would be subject to all regular rules of the school.

Justification: IDEA hinders a school district's ability to apply discipline to a student for behavior that is a manifestation of his or her disability.

3. The Pennsylvania State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education should amend their regulations to be identical with federal law, thereby promulgating one consistent standard for discipline.

Explanation: The Pennsylvania Department of Education should amend its' regulations permitting 15 days cumulative suspension of special education students to be consistent with the 10-day federal limit.

Justification: Confusion exists within the field concerning the authority of school officials to discipline students with disabilities. This results from differing and conflicting requirements found within Federal legislation and Chapter 14 and Section 342 of the Pennsylvania School Code. This change would eliminate the confusion created by current state regulations.

4. The Pennsylvania General Assembly should adopt legislation clarifying any student's right to public education following expulsion.

Explanation: Current law allows for the expulsion of students for misconduct after a hearing before the Board of School Directors. Students who are under 17 years of age are still subject to the state's compulsory school attendance laws and must be provided with an education. The state board of education regulations place initial responsibility for providing the education on the parent. If, after 30 days, the expelled student is not provided with education, the parent may submit written evidence of school officials of their inability to provide it, the district has the obligation to make some provision for the student's education.

The obligations of 1. The school district that expelled the student, 2. Another district to which the student has moved the following expulsion, 3. The parents of the expelled student are often unclear. It usually comes down to who will pay for the alternate program for the student.

Justification: Legislation would provide clarity as to the required responsibilities of school districts and parents for education of expelled students. In addition, this would provide school districts with sufficient guidance to administer policies regarding expelled students in a consistent manner.

Prevention / Intervention Strategies

5. School districts should implement prevention / intervention programs based on a comprehensive assessment of their students' needs.

Explanation: The comprehensive assessment should include quantitative data as well as a survey of school district personnel, students, parents and community members. Some school districts are currently choosing programs without completing a needs assessment.

Justification: Effective prevention / intervention programs vary in terms of their target goals. Therefore, school districts need to choose programs that reflect the individual needs of their school district in order to be meaningful and cost effective.

6. Schools and local institutions of higher education should partner in order to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention/intervention programs implemented by school districts.

Explanation: The responses to the survey indicate that many school districts are not evaluating the prevention/intervention programs that they implement or they are evaluating programs based on subjective criteria.

Justification: School district and university partnerships can provide technical expertise that is needed to assess programs based on objective criteria. The university personnel will benefit because the research base on effective programs can be extended. The school districts will benefit because they will have verification as to the credibility of programs that they implement to help prevent violence.

7. Schools should implement research-based prevention/intervention programs that have been proven effective.

Explanation: Results of the survey indicate that school districts are implementing programs that are widely disseminated but not necessarily research based. Many prevention/intervention programs have been investigated to determine the relationship between the program and targeted goals. A number of programs that have been investigated have proven to be very effective in meeting their targeted goals based on objective criteria. These programs should be given first consideration by school districts.

Justification: The point of implementing any prevention/intervention program is that it will make a positive difference in educating students, parents, school personnel and the wider community about ways of dealing with conflict and frustration effectively. There are many effective research-based programs that do not have a proven track record in reducing violence should not be implemented. If school districts implement programs that are not research based, they may foster a sense of complacency where there is no real change in the potential for violence in the schools.

8. All schools should train staff to identify and address behaviors and risk factors that may affect a student's potential to engage in violence and aggression.

Explanation: Personnel who work with students need to be sensitive to the ways that students communicate their anger and frustration by engaging in inappropriate behavior. They need to be able to identify early warning signs of potentially violent behavior and connect students to appropriate school and community resources.

Justification: When staff are trained to identify behaviors that may result in a violent act, students can be given help at a time when they are most susceptible to changing their behavior. When school districts reduce the risk factors within the school community that correlate with violence, they will also reduce the potential for violence.

Viability of Zero Tolerance

9. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should develop Zero Tolerance training and resource materials.

Explanation: The Safe Schools Act of Pennsylvania requires school districts to develop policies in which the possession of weapons is prohibited on any school property, any school-sponsored activity or any public conveyance providing transportation to a school or school-sponsored activity. The local education providers need guidance in order to provide administration of these policies and sufficient guidance to ensure the student's rights are not violated. Zero Tolerance Training and Resources would ensure that consequences for weapons possession in Pennsylvania schools are administered in a consistent manner.

Justification: School districts and educational providers require Training and Response in order to ensure consistent reporting for violent incidents to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. A more efficient reporting procedure would ensure an accurate picture of the number and degree of violent incidents that occur in Pennsylvania's schools.

10. The Pennsylvania General Assembly should amend Act 26 to define "act of violence."

Explanation: Currently, Pennsylvania law does not provide a definition for "acts of violence." The information contained in the Violence and Weapons Possession Report provided to PDE annually is based on locally developed collection and reporting procedures. Although some guidance is provided, it is primarily up to the individual school district to determine what constitutes an "act of violence." To some districts this could mean a pushing and shoving match or to another district this may rise to the level of a reportable "act of violence." A clarification from the General Assembly would provide a consistent report of acts of violence form across the state.

Justification: The current Violence and Weapons Possession Report is unable to provide an accurate representation of the level and type of violence occurring in our schools due to the limitations of the existing data. A uniform definition of "acts of violence" would assist the state in developing a more accurate picture of the safety conditions and issues that exist in schools and allow for a more appropriate targeting of resources.

11. Local law enforcement should ensure that all drug offenses in a Drug-Free School Zone are prosecuted with the youth/ school enhancement sentence.

Explanation: Under the direct file provisions of the Juvenile Act, an offender over the age of 15, who with a weapon commits offenses such as rape, robbery, arson, etc. is automatically treated as an adult, and will face prosecution and sentencing as an adult. Drug offenses are not on this list.

Justification: Currently in Pennsylvania there is no such type of sentence in the juvenile justice system for drug offenders under the age of 18; the sentence rests within the sole discretion of the Juvenile Court Judge. Local law enforcement should ensure that sentence enhancements are sought after in appropriate instances to ensure the safety in schools.

Crisis Management and Response

12. Every school in Pennsylvania should form a Comprehensive Interagency Task Force to develop early identification and intervention programs for troubled youth who threaten the safety of all children.

Explanation: Sitting on this task force should be the CEO's, or managers with decision making authority, from the school district, the police, JPO, the Juvenile Courts, Children and Youth Services, county detention centers, the appropriate county agency through which mental health services flow, and the United Way.

Justification: According to our survey, 338 respondents state that their crisis or emergency plan was developed in concert with local law enforcement agencies and emergency response groups. There must be a strong and open communication between local law enforcement and school officials. In addition, they must address the concerns of the local community and its agencies to further assist in the early identification and intervention programs for troubled youth.

13. Every school should develop a comprehensive crisis management and response plan to include a more complete range of potential crisis situations.

Explanation: The very nature of crisis is that of unpredictability. Having a comprehensive school crisis plan in place can save time and energy and can maintain order when unforeseen problems arise. The ideal for every school building is to be prepared for the unanticipated and unimaginable, utilizing all of the communities resource to respond to what we hope will never occur. While schools have begun to look at safety plans, which address the security of their campuses, most schools have neglected to prepare their staff, students and communities in the event of a crisis. A comprehensive crisis management program includes a plan, which is proactive and includes prevention, intervention, response, aftermath, and the recovery components that address potential and materialized problems. The development of a crisis response plan is one part larger, comprehensive safe school plan that addresses the overall climate

Justification: Based upon the data gathered as a result of the problem identification process, 249 respondents did not have any plan in the event of a kidnapping on campus, 284 respondents have no plan pertaining to a rape on campus, 298 have no plan pertaining to a rape suspect, 211 respondents have no plan for a shooting and 207 have no plan pertaining to a hostage situation. Each school should implement in-house initiatives and community partnerships that touch all areas of school-life programs, policies, pupil services and management strategies. By making safe schools initiative part of the school culture, the expectation of order is created.

14. The Pennsylvania General Assembly should provide ongoing funding for schools to develop and implement comprehensive school safety plans.

Explanation: There is a need to reallocate current funding to require a focused, coordinated safe school effort. Funds should be provided for staff development for school personnel that addresses critical safe school efforts i.e. crisis response. Provide funds for institutions of higher education to institute safe schools awareness training for undergraduates in education.

Adequate funding should be provided to Local Education Agencies (LEA's) to develop focused, coordinated safe school plans. Funds should be provided for planning, staff development for school personnel as well as research-based programs that address critical safe school issues. A comprehensive safe school plan requires a coordinated effort between the school district and the community. A safe school plan is the framework that guides current and future planning. Its goal should be to provide a positive safe climate for every student in the Commonwealth to learn.

Justification: Establishing a safe school plan is a long-term, systematic, and comprehensive process. Each school and community must identify needs and strategies that are required to meet those needs. It

is an ongoing process. School districts are in a unique position to bring together multiple entities and facilitate a process that focuses on student and staff safety.

15. The Pennsylvania General Assembly should repeal § 739 of the public school code to allow classroom doors to open inward.

Explanation: All school buildings should comply with the relevant fire codes. These codes generally require exterior doors and the doors to large rooms to open outward. § 739 requires every door in schools to open outward.

Justification: The code limits design flexibility and often results in halls lined with “door wells”, which provides an area for people to hide. “Door wells” also make it difficult for people to scan the hallways.



Alternative Education

16. The Department of Education should develop consistent criteria on how students are assigned to Alternative Education Programs.

Explanation: There should be a model process to help create consistency in alternative education assignments. The model would define a procedure for proper school assignments and a review process by receiving school. It might include an interview with the appropriate parties (the student, the parent/guardian, and other representatives of legal and social service agencies) to establish expected behavior and identify necessary support services.

Justification: Currently, alternative education assignments by school districts are not made using compatible guidelines. As a result, behavior that may be cause for a student's transfer to an Alternative Education Program in one instance may not receive the same consequences in another.

17. Schools districts should develop alternative settings for disruptive students with specialized staff and additional support services, including appropriate collaboration with non-school agencies charged with working with children and families.

Explanation: To provide a "second chance" for those whose needs have not, or could not be met by the traditional, comprehensive public school, alternative schools can offer a positive school experience in a supportive environment and an atmosphere free of negative labels. In this type of caring, disciplined atmosphere, young people from different backgrounds with many causes for past school difficulties can experience school success.

Justification: There are students who are disruptive to the educational process with problematic school histories who require a setting apart from the traditional public school. They are far more likely to dropout if they are not provided with an alternative that recognizes and supports their additional needs.

18. Schools should develop transition supports for students upon their return to school from an out of school placement.

Explanation: Students returning from an out of school placement may pose a threat to other students, staff or themselves. A process for their re-establishment in the school routine can assist in their reentry to the regular education program. This may consist of a newly created department or the coordination of existing resources.

Justification: Comprehensive programs that closely monitor all aspects of a student's re-entry from placement ensure the effective return to school. Programs like the Y.A.L.E. program at John Bartram H.S. (Phila) have demonstrated record of success in serving returning students.





**Professional Development and
Instructional Issues
Working Group**
Recommendations

State gets input for school safety plan

By Carmen J. Lee
Pittsburgh Courier Education Writer

State Attorney General Mike Fisher said yesterday he will probably re-examine a proposal from a school safety committee that calls for having school districts and state officials maintain records of the race, ethnicity and gender of students involved in school violence incidents.

During a public hearing on school safety in Pittsburgh City Council chambers, in Duquesne, Firestone High School Principal Ronald Dufalla said he disagreed with the recommendation because collecting such data without explanation could be misconstrued as trying to identify students considered prone to violence.

After the hearing, Fisher agreed misinterpretations could occur, so he said his office will consider whether keeping the student data is necessary.

The proposal is among 28 recommendations from the professional development and instructional issues working group of the attorney general's Task Force on School Safety.

The working group, which conducted yesterday's hearing, is one of five committees of the task force. Each is developing proposals to be considered for a school safety plan that will be unveiled during a School Safety Summit Sept. 15-16 in Harrisburg.

Fisher said yesterday some parts of the plan may require legislation, but, in general, his office intends to distribute the report to school districts and to encourage them to incorporate the recommendations in their own safety plans.

The attorney general added that while his task force is recommending that the General Assembly make a long-term commitment to funding school safety efforts, most of the proposals require adjusting priorities and redefining current programs rather than more money.

"I don't see big dollars being spent," he said. "The most public hearing will be conducted by the community outreach and information group."

At yesterday's hearing,

officials, a Perry Traditional Academy senior, a Norwin Senior High School guidance counselor, a Schenley High School teacher and a representative from the Pennsylvania School Board Association testified before a panel of educators and government officials.

For the most part, all of those who spoke supported the committee's proposals concerning ways curriculum and staff training could help improve school safety.

Several speakers emphasized that violence prevention programs should start as early as elementary school, rather than waiting to conduct them in high school.

Terry Kirschner, superintendent of the Bergetstown Area School District, suggested expanding teacher training by requiring student teachers to spend time in classrooms with students with social or emotional needs as part of their classroom work.

Some speakers also suggested that professors at colleges and universities should have more experience

Stanley Denton, multicultural education coordinator for the Pittsburgh Public Schools, said schools should be involved in teaching children social skills and how to interact appropriately with youngsters who are different from themselves.

"We can teach behavior just as we can teach science and mathematics," he said.

Fisher said he liked an idea offered by George Genssere, head of Schenley High's math department, concerning a proposal to create a clearinghouse that would maintain evaluations on various school safety and violence reduction programs on the market.

He suggested that such a clearinghouse could place its information on an Internet Web site.

"This site would become a prime source for school entities to retrieve data relative to these programs and techniques," Genssere said. "A well-maintained Web site would provide comprehensive findings and data to market sources, cost comparisons and more in a useful format."



Pre-Service Training

1. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should require more uniformity in the way education majors are certified as teachers and should include courses in classroom management.

Explanation: Certifying colleges and universities have a degree of latitude, subject to state approval, in implementing these general and specific standards. Because there are 91 certifying institutions and over 50 certificates, certification programs vary in scope, content and emphasis.

Justification: Over 200 school entities indicated that their staffs are inadequately prepared in the following classroom management skills; early identification of troubled students, working with at risk students, classroom behavior management, conflict resolution, multi-cultural competence, knowledge of applicable laws and crisis response training.

2. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should more closely monitor and evaluate certification institutions to ensure student teachers receive classroom experience and training in classroom management.

Explanation: The institution's education faculty who are responsible for teaching methodology courses and/or supervising field experiences and student teaching must be of a sufficient number and have had experience at the elementary, secondary, supervisory, or administrative level commensurate with the candidate's area of study. Institutional support shall be provided for the education faculty for the continued development of scholarly expertise, the acquisition of knowledge of the current practices in basic education and experiences in basic education community.

Justification: We asked respondents to rate how adequately Pennsylvania's undergraduate programs in teacher training are preparing students to be effective in the following areas: early identification of troubled students; working with risk students; classroom behavior management; conflict resolution; multi-cultural competence; knowledge of applicable laws; crisis response training. The survey were quite clear-our educators do not feel adequately prepared for their jobs by institutions of higher learning with regards to school safety issues.

3. Colleges of education should require instructional staff in teacher certification programs to have on-going field experiences in schools.

Explanation: To provide quality teacher preparation, it is important for college and university staff in teacher preparation programs to have school-based experiences that provides them with first-hand experience in classroom functioning and needs.

Justification: Survey respondents recommended that to make the training program more realistic and relevant, college professors should be required to spend more time in the field.

In-Service Training

4. State education associations and agencies should expand collaborative efforts to share resources in the areas of violence prevention and school safety.

Explanation: Violence prevention and school safety are important issues. It would be beneficial if Pennsylvania educators more systematically shared information regarding general needs and promising practices to address these needs.

Justification: Survey results indicate that inservice training programs related to violence prevention/schoolsafety are provided in schools throughout the Commonwealth. There continues to be a strong need for training in preventative techniques, crisis response, and early identification of at-risk students. School entities need a more efficient approach for determining the effectiveness of the multitude of programs and options available to them.

5. Schools should provide training for all employees, specifically including paraprofessionals (e.g., recess and cafeteria monitors, secretaries, bus drivers and classroom aides), in the areas of behavior management and conflict resolution.

Explanation: Many paraprofessionals and educational support staff work in relatively unstructured school areas such as playgrounds, cafeterias, or school buses. These are areas where conflicts, fights, and bullying often arise. Staff working in these locations need skills to identify potential problems and manage them effectively.

Justification: Survey results clearly indicate that paraprofessionals have a strong need to develop skills in managing behavior and resolving conflicts, de-escalating volatile situations, identifying at-risk students, and reporting problems and concerns.

6. Vocational-technical schools should provide training for all school staff in areas pertaining to violence prevention and school safety.

Explanation: Many vocational-technical schools in Pennsylvania are not part of a school district or intermediate unit. As stand-alone entities, it appears their staffs receive less training in school safety areas than teachers in other settings do.

Justification: Survey results indicate vocational-technical school staff receive less training than teachers in other school entities in Student Assistance Programs, peer mediation, conflict resolution, crisis response team, and parent involvement.

7. Each school district should assure that all professional staff receive safe school in-service training on an ongoing basis.

Explanation: School safety is an area that requires ongoing vigilance. The most effective approach in one that focuses on prevention. Although schools should be prepared to deal with crises, strategies such as strengthening the sense of community and helping students develop productive social skills are essential.

Justification: Although Pennsylvania's schools have provided a broad range of training in areas related to violence prevention on school safety, survey results confirm that needs are ongoing. Specifically, programs dealing with prevention, crisis management, and identification of at-risk students are needed.

Staffing Needs Other Than Teachers

8. Resources should be provided for training school counselors, social workers, psychologists and nurses in school safety-related areas such as conflict resolution, early identification of at-risk children, character education and peer mediation.

Explanation: The pupil services staff have a key role to play in prevention, intervention, and postvention activities to promote school safety. To better fulfill their role and responsibilities, counselors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers require extensive training in the most promising practices for delivering their services to all children. Either resources must be made more readily available to staff or sufficient funds must be provided to school entities to obtain their own professional development programs.

Justification: Survey results indicate that pupil services staff have not received adequate preparation during their university training programs in school safety issues. Counselors in particular reported being unprepared to address these concerns. Many districts were not offering professional development on the requested topics or were offering it as a "one-shot" effort which would not likely be committed to memory.

9. School entities should employ additional pupil services staff to meet the needs of students at risk.

Explanation: This may require the mandating of pupil services staff and sufficient state funding to support the employment of additional personnel. Students at risk need access to counseling and therapeutic services when a crisis arises. Current staff ratios are insufficient in many districts to meet the demand. At present, only school nurses are mandated in the schools. Certification does not even exist for school social workers, who must therefore be employed fully at local expense.

Justification: In more than half the districts, additional counselors were seen as key to providing the safe school services necessary. To a lesser extent, social workers and school psychologists were also in demand. With such staff already servicing hundreds and sometimes thousands of students, accessibility becomes a critical issue. Districts do not feel that they have the resources to support additional non-instructional staff.

10. College and university curricula for the training of pupil services staff should include instruction on peer mediation, character education, diversity issues, behavior management, student assistance and conflict management/resolution.

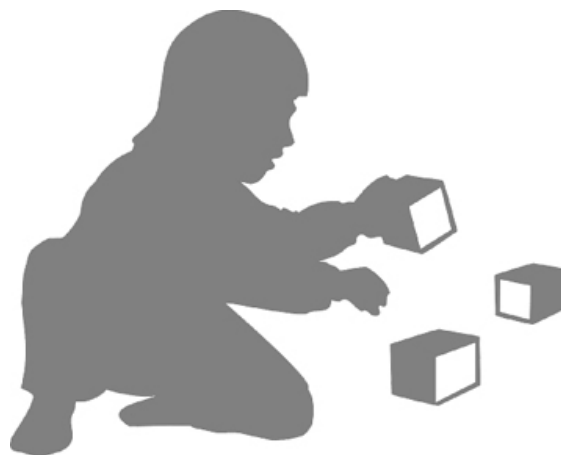
Explanation: Current college and university training programs touch lightly, if at all, on issues of school safety. These areas should be incorporated into appropriate course syllabi so that newly trained counselors, nurses, school psychologists and social workers can be hired at a level of proficiency that will not require extensive in-service.

Justification: Most counselors in a statewide survey reported that they were ill-prepared to address school safety issues. Reviews of university curricula show little attention being given to these topics. Staff show a desire to receive such training either prior to certification or after employment. The most efficient way to address this is to have staff trained during their preparation programs so that they may enter into their duties fully competent in prevention and intervention strategies.

11. The Commonwealth should expand the Student Assistance Program from its current mandated operation in all secondary schools to include all elementary schools.

Explanation: This will require modifications to the existing program design to adjust for the age difference between students who attend secondary and elementary schools and differences in student enrollment and staff availability in elementary schools. When the Student Assistance Program was first established in 1991 problems of alcohol and drug abuse and school violence were rare in the elementary school grades (typically K-5 or K-6). With these problems becoming increasingly more common in the late elementary school grades and even occasionally in the primary grades, appropriate services and supports should be put into place in elementary schools. This is especially critical given the limited number of full-time school counselors available in elementary schools.

Justification: The Department of Education is currently initiating an elementary school pilot program. This effort should be carefully reviewed and its results evaluated. If the pilot is successful, the Commonwealth should consider mandating school districts to train Student Assistance Program teams in each elementary school.



Curriculum Improvements

12. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should continue to encourage school districts to include within their school safety plans ways in which they will address violence prevention efforts in their curricula.

Explanation: Although research indicates that most school entities have developed school safety plans, it is unclear how many have incorporated within their plans the need to develop appropriate curriculum. Schools should be encouraged to realize the importance of including appropriate curriculum as a critical part of developing and implementing a safety plan that encompasses much more than just efforts related to security and incidence-reporting. Schools should thoughtfully consider and address how they will reach out to students through whatever curriculum they choose.

Research also shows that many schools are beginning to develop and/or use a wide variety of techniques and programs to address school safety issues. Further, there is some state funding available on a competitive grant basis to help schools get started. Schools should “close the loop” by ensuring that their curriculum needs are part of their safety plans.

Justification: While the results of a survey conducted by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association shows that 98% of school entities have adopted a school safety plan, it appears that fewer have formally integrated into their plan the need to include issues related to curriculum. A review of the data collected by the task force shows a strong correlation between staff input and development of a plan. However, development of the plan for the school entity does not always get carried into the curriculum area.

13. A central clearinghouse should be established through the Center for Safe Schools to distribute and collect evaluations from school entities regarding various school safety and violence reduction programs marketed and sold to school entities.

Explanation: There are many products, vendors and techniques available to school entities to adopt into their curriculum. However, unless a school has had an opportunity to review or observe such a program in action, they may end up with a program that ultimately is not suitable or appropriate for what they want to accomplish.

Justification: Schools are faced with the challenge not only of adopting appropriate programs for their needs, but of being able to properly fund their implementation. Although some state grants have been distributed on a competitive basis, grantees received only up to 52.8% of what they requested. Because many grantees spent much of those initial funds on hardware and other immediate needs, there is little money available for curriculum-based programs. Therefore, it is very important that taxpayer resources be used wisely by having a resource established for schools to use to review programs to determine if they might be appropriate for their individual and unique circumstances.

A state review panel could compile a listing of programs, who is using them, contact persons, and what issues the programs address. The panel also could seek and receive evaluations from school entities that are using particular programs. While the panel would stop short of rating or endorsing a particular program, it could provide some initial recommendation of whether the program is worthy of continued use, who it may be best suited for, etc.

14. The General Assembly should make a long-term commitment to provide funding to school entities for school safety/violence prevention efforts.

Explanation: While the General Assembly has provided funding to schools in the past few state budgets and did so again for 2000-01, there is no requirement or guarantee that this program will continue, particularly with a new administration. Schools know that the problems and issues surrounding violence prevention and safety are not quickly or easily resolved. The most effective approach is with a long-term integration and continuation of services. The survey results clearly and resoundingly showed that schools need time, resources and money to help them implement and/or expand their comprehensive program goals.

Justification: Safety and violence prevention is a concern not only to school personnel, but to taxpayers and parents. And while schools are appreciative for the funding that has been offered, the need for increased appropriations is critical. In the current round of state funding, \$22 million was distributed to selected grant applicants. However, grantees received only about half of what they requested. Faced with numerous other demands on their budgets, school boards must make tough choices. Unfortunately, this often means sacrificing needed programs. Additional and continued funding is necessary if we expect schools to make long-term, effective strides in violence prevention.

State committee suggests 20 safety guidelines

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employees, specifically including recess
and cafeteria monitors, secretaries, bus dri-
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tion.

6. Vocational-technical schools should
provide training for all school staff in areas
such as violence prevention and school
safety.

7. Each school district should assure that
all professional staff receive safe school in-
service training on an ongoing basis.

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safety-related areas as conflict resolution,
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9. Schools should employ additional pupil
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10. College and university curricula for
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11. The Student Assistance Program
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Diversity Issues

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Diversity Issues

15. Schools should regularly review their adopted written policies and student handbooks to ensure that harassment is prohibited.

Explanation: The written policy should include the district's commitment to the following: eliminating harassment; defining different types of harassment; specifying procedures for responding to reports of harassment; prohibiting retaliation against people who report and providing guidance in considering First Amendment/freedom of speech issues.

Justification: As evidenced by state and federal hate crime statistics, acts of violence among young people are an increasing phenomena. Therefore, school staff need to be kept current on both the nature of the problem and effective responses in order to understand what responsible measures they can take to provide a safe and respectful educational environment for all students.

16. Schools should provide ongoing training to all staff on identifying and responding to incidents and patterns of verbal and physical school violence.

Explanation: That process should include encouraging students and parents to report incidents; train staff to appropriately respond; require employees to report incidents and to intervene; make appropriate law enforcement referrals; investigate all reports; and take prompt remedial action.

Justification: As evidenced by state and federal hate crime statistics, acts of violence among young people are an increasing phenomena. Therefore, school staff need to be kept current on both the nature of the problem and effective responses in order to understand what reasonable measures they can take to provide a safe and respectful educational environment for all students.

17. Schools should work with law enforcement, local government and other civic organizations to prevent and respond to inter-group tensions in the school and community.

Explanation: That should include educating the school community about hate crimes laws that apply in the school's jurisdiction; recognizing bias-motivated violence; appropriate contacting law enforcement; preparing for crisis situations; coordinating the school's anti-harassment activities with the larger community; and enforcing anti-harassment policies consistently and vigorously as well as alternative problem-solving and increased tolerance diversity.

Justification: The school is not an island. Intergroup tensions among youth that begin in the community can surface in the school and vice versa.

This recommendation is supported by the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights; the National Association of Attorneys General and the National School Boards Association.

18. Schools need to develop programs/curricula which help to maintain an overall environment designed to build bridges of communication and understanding among diverse groups.

Explanation: We must encourage schools—as well as teacher preparation colleges and universities—to adopt human relations education to dispel stereotypes, encourage broader intercultural understanding and appreciation, and reduce the incidence of hate violence. Such efforts should begin in the earliest school years with specialized curricula for children and be continued throughout the school years.

Providing multi cultural programming is not something schools should wait to do in response to racial tensions. It gives all students the skills they need to live and work in an increasingly diverse society. The four primary dimensions of a multi cultural education are:

- 1) **Content integration.**
Adding information about diverse cultures to curricula.
- 2) **Epistemological Issues.**
This addresses, for example, by whom and for whom were text books created.
- 3) **Equity Pedagogy.**
Using teaching strategies, like cooperative learning, that better enable children from various cultures to learn.
- 4) **School Environment.**
Creating school cultures that promote equity; for example, looking at ability groupings, sports participation and attitudes, and interactions of students and staff across racial/religious/ethnic/economic lines.

Justification: An effective multi cultural education can be a key component in decreasing acts of violence among children. Among the organizations which support teaching children to understand and respect difference as a vehicle for creating safe schools are: The U.S. Department of Education, the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the American Counseling Association, the National Associations of Elementary and of Secondary School Principals, the National Mental Health Association, and the National PTA.

Two key components of safe and respectful educational environments are academic achievement for all students and equitable discipline. The U.S. Department of Education in its Guide to Safe Schools states: “Effective schools convey the attitude that all children can achieve academically and behave appropriately, while at the same time appreciating individual differences. Adequate resources and programs help to ensure that expectations are met. Students who do not receive the support they are less likely to behave in socially desirable ways.



**Private and Parochial Schools
Working Group**
Recommendations

Private, parochial schools focus of safety hearing

Among recommendations discussed by the task force were more extracurricular activities and a crisis plan.

By Mark Strub
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

SPRINGFIELD — More extracurricular activities, better communication between schools and police were among the recommendations advanced yesterday by Pennsylvania Attorney General Mike Fisher during a school-safety hearing at Cardinal O'Hara High School.

Fisher, who is running for re-election this year, said he was challenged by Jim Egan as Task Force chair last August. Last

week, Judge Emeritus of Delaware County, the task force has held school-safety hearings throughout the state.

The task force may make revisions to the 34 recommendations announced yesterday before presenting its final report as part of a school-safety action plan at a state-wide School Safety Summit on Sept. 15 and 16 in Harrisburg.

Yesterday's hearing, the last one in the group, focused on safety in private and parochial schools.

point of the public demands a swift, certain and consistent response by all critical players," said Kevin Kelly, a Delaware County Court judge and former juvenile-crimes prosecutor.

Kelly spoke in favor of the task force's recommendation that private and parochial schools develop memorandums of understanding — comprehensive plans that can involve school officials, police and emergency services to work in concert in the event of a school crisis.

Memorandums of understanding are required by state law in public schools but not private and parochial schools, Fisher said.

"The importance of memorandums of understanding cannot be expressed too much," said Lt. John

Gallagher, a Springfield police officer and the commander of the Central Delaware County Tactical Response Team.

Thomas O'Brien, director of secondary-school services for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, spoke in favor of more comprehensive teacher training.

He said that new teachers "feel they need better information on the identification of at-risk kids and helping them get help."

Perhaps the simplest task-force recommendation was addressed by Lauren Hudnell, a senior at Archbishop Prendergast High School.

"Private and parochial schools should expand extracurricular activities," said Hudnell, who is ac-

tive in her school's band and chess. "I have found that with activities, I have time for nothing to

Hudnell's testimony was bolstered by Mary Kirby, the assistant principal of Cardinal O'Hara. Kirby said research shows that juvenile violence peaks between 3 and 5 p.m., double the level of activity between 3 and 5 p.m. — but only a few school days. O'Hara's school is

"We've created a way in which schools in Pennsylvania are going to be better prepared to prevent violent outbreaks and to make schools safer," Fisher said.

Mark Strub's e-mail address is strubm@phillynews.com



Community Outreach and Involvement

1. Private and parochial schools should expand the options of extra-curricular activities to accommodate a broader base of students' interests.

Explanation: Administrators should conduct a student-wide survey to determine where additional extra-curricular interests lie. The survey should allow students to choose at least three extra-curricular activities that they would like to participate in, which are not currently offered by their school and then rank them in order from their most to least desired. There should also be a section within the survey that asks for an explanation of why the student is interested in each certain activity and, additionally, what she or he thinks each particular suggestion could do to increase their learning and/or social development at school. It would also be valuable to ask students for their suggestions on how to implement these programs as well.

After the survey is completed, the answers should be coded and tailed in order to determine what activities are most popular. A teacher should then analyze the answers or administrator who can assess what programs they feel would have the most positive affect on their students based on the explanations from the students themselves. Student government officials could also play an important role in this process, by guiding the administration to fully understand the implications of what the students are requesting. As money is always an issue, student leaders should be willing to organize some kind of fundraising in order to generate the capital necessary to provide these additional programs.

Educators at private and parochial schools must also implement a "late bus" program to allow students the opportunity to participate in after school activities, regardless of their family transportation situations. A majority of public high schools already have a "late bus" which enables students to participate in after school activities even when their parents/family are unable to adhere to the student's extracurricular schedule. As public schools currently pair with private and parochial schools for regular transportation, it is only fair that these students are afforded the same opportunity of later transportation as well.

If students were allowed to utilize school facilities, they would be given a safe place to get together, to learn and to play music, all in a supervised setting. This would increase their dedication to their musical talent, their comfort within school facilities and reinforce the idea that school is about all types of learning. Other ideas we discussed included offering some of the atypical sports as after-school activities. Skateboarders, rollerbladers, and bikers are usually without a safe place to express their athletic interest. Whether these types of sports are offered within the schools themselves or at a local community facility, embracing these sports as legitimate will build confidence and a feeling of acceptance. Self-esteem is critical to our youth when making decisions about alcohol, drugs, sex and violence. The better our students feel about the potential of their futures, the less interested they will be in activities that represent hurdles to those successes.

Justification: It has been well known for years that one of the most important areas of a young person's growth depends upon their ability to participate in activities that impact their creative and personal, in addition to educational, abilities. Unfortunately, within our school systems, the current after-school programs that are offered only cater to a specific population of today's youth. There are a plethora of academic and athletic after-school activities, but not all students have the skills necessary in

order to be chosen or to be able to participate. We would recommend that schools begin taking a look at other programs that can be incorporated as after-school activities that would appeal to a greater diversity of students.

2. Private and parochial schools should partner with community groups to utilize resources and enhance their offerings of after-school programs.

Explanation: While most administrators and teachers firmly support the benefits of additional extra-curricular activities, many are struggling with their schedules to begin with and would not be able to staff the activities even when they want to. Additionally, there is only so much space in schools, so we suggest that administrators reach out and develop relationships with community organizations to help amen the situation.

School personnel need to develop a “working group” of themselves, other educational professionals, parents and students in order to discuss the feasibility of offering extra-curricular activities within another venue. The local YMCA for example, or any local community center would be a prime location for this kind of activity expansion. These arenas often offer supervision and activities at lower cost by employing young adults to work as counselors and mentors for youth. They also have a much larger arena for expanding the variety of activities at a minimal fee. In addition, we suggest that including these community centers will increase students’ acceptance of diversity as they are offered an opportunity to circulate with a crowd even serve as mentors themselves and thus be in a fun, supervised learning arena, while further developing their own discipline and responsibility. Maybe the schools could even work out a trade between students/staff volunteer to assist within their neighborhood community center, they earn 20 minutes of recreation time for an activity of their choosing within the facility.

Justification: Some students do their best learning on field trips. Sometimes being outside of the school building itself can increase the student’s sense of freedom while ensuring a certain level of supervision at the same time. Students are less nervous about comparison with their peers and everyone is more comfortable when they feel they are in their own element. We believe that there is a significant difference between the interaction of students in school and the interaction of those same students on their own “turf”. If we offer community centers, skating rinks or parks as a locale for after-school programs, natural defense mechanisms should subside, thus making communication between students, and between students and teachers/supervisors better. When our students feel comfortable with who and where they are, the tension between the different “cliques” of students should subside and result in providing a safer area for students in which to develop whom it is they want to be.

Professional Development and Instructional Issues

3. Colleges of education should require that their undergraduate course offerings include courses and training in the following areas: early identification of troubled students, working with at-risk students, classroom behavior management, conflict resolution, multi-cultural issues, crisis training and applicable law.

Explanation: While the reality of the increased need for more in-depth teacher training in the areas mentioned herein, are readily apparent to school administrators and faculty members, colleges of education do not face the significance of the need for this type of training in the classroom. The need for this training, therefore, must be communicated to colleges so that relevant courses can be offered to students in the education curriculum.

Justification: Respondents to the survey indicated that at best teacher training in these areas is no more than somewhat adequate but with a heavy indication that such training is inadequate.

4. Private and parochial schools should conduct an assessment of the perceived need for a violence prevention/school safety curriculum for students, teachers, administrators and staff.

Explanation: There is an absence of a thorough evaluation of the adequacy of a violence prevention/school safety curriculum, potential areas of conflict and violence among the students that may go undetected.

Justification: Eighty-two percent of the respondents indicated that they have not completed a recent assessment of such a violence prevention/school safety curriculum.

5. Private and parochial schools should integrate conflict resolution training into the curriculum for all grade levels and into the agenda for teacher In-Service training.

Explanation: The steps of conflict identification, reflection and response (rather than reaction) will allow those involved to better understand their personal reactions, that of the other person and the relative value and basis for each view. This process bears fruit through a reasoned response which, while perhaps not insuring acceptance of the other's view, respects the right of that person.

Justification: In an article summarizing a three-year study conducted by Friends Council on Education (FCE) entitled "Embracing the Tension" (1998), Irene McHenry, the FCE Student Coordinator, indicated that the study which was conducted at Friends' Schools throughout the country, revealed a surprising finding. "The astounding result of the FCE study was that conflict was, the locus for moral growth in adolescents."

6. Private and parochial schools should address the issues of multiculturalism and diversity to further promote tolerance and understanding.

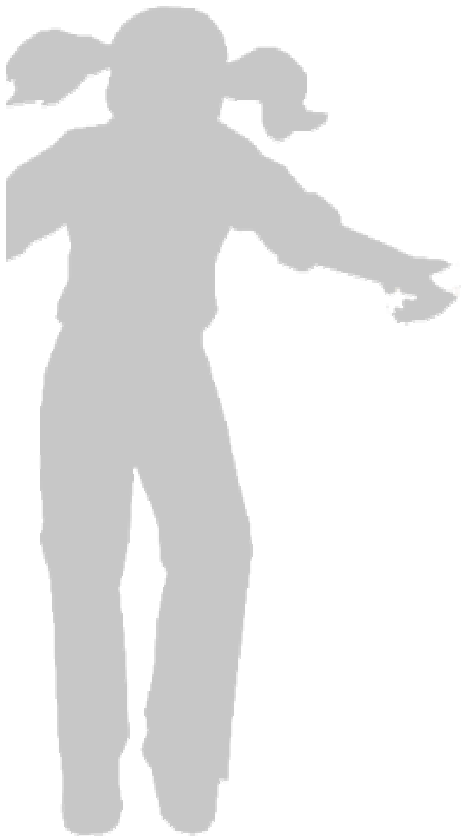
Explanation: The basis for hate crimes, bigotry and discrimination is most often ignorance about the nature of those who are viewed as different. By recognizing diversity among the students and society, we open the door to understanding that diversity, in and of itself, is not wrong nor something to be loathed.

Justification: Survey returns indicated that less than 50% of schools responding provide some type of awareness assemblies or multicultural celebrations.

7. *Private and parochial schools should review their availability for additional guidance counselors to meet school safety needs.*

Explanation: It was felt among the majority of the survey respondents that guidance counselors are an invaluable resource in preventing incidents of violence within private and parochial schools. To increase the effectiveness of any safety program, a review of what resources are available to increase the number of guidance counselors is imperative.

Justification: Survey returns indicate that guidance counselors are most needed to improve school safety in private and parochial schools.



Law and Judiciary

8. Private and parochial schools should work with local law enforcement to develop crisis preparation plans that address a wide range of violent incidents.

Explanation: School administrators and teachers do not have the training and/or the experience to effectively deal with the identification and prevention of violence within the school. By working with local law enforcement officials, however, that expertise is readily available.

Justification: It has been demonstrated many times that cooperation between school officials and police in the development, implementation and maintenance of school safety programs results in much more expedient and effective response to violent incidents and crisis resolution. Detective Mark Cotton from the Springfield Police Department has stated “When one of our local high schools received a bomb threat, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind as to what everyone had to do. Because of our joint effort at developing a safety plan, the police and emergency response teams know exactly where to go. The school administrators and faculty acted professionally and decisively. Had the threat been real, many lives would have been saved and injuries avoided.”

9. Private and parochial schools should develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with local police and emergency response teams.

Explanation: By reviewing the contents of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with police, errors will be avoided that would otherwise go unnoticed by school officials, who are not experts at crisis management. This step-by-step process of completing an MOU also raises the awareness among school personnel of other risk factors present within the school building.

Justification: Statistics have borne out the proposition that preparation is the most effective means of dealing with violent incidents and crisis resolution. A Memorandum of Understanding is a key element of school safety preparedness. A MOU provides teachers and administrators with instructions on how to communicate more effectively with police and emergency response personnel thus allowing the police, et al, to respond appropriately.

In addition to the MOU (or as a supplement thereto), the police should be provided with floor plans for each level of the school building as well as for appurtenant structures and all other facilities that are part of the school campus.

School Management and Crisis Preparation

10. Private and parochial schools should complete a thorough analysis of their safety program needs.

Explanation: Interviews with school administrators and teachers indicated that, with few exceptions, private and parochial schools do not, at least on a consistent basis, analyze their safety plans in light of the changing nature of violent incidents.

Justification: Presuming that a safety plan is adequately based on the fact that the entity has had no violent episodes or crises that were not handled effectively by school personnel, will virtually guarantee an inappropriate and, therefore, ineffective response to the unexpected.

11. Private and parochial schools should establish a complaint/referral process through which students who are victimized can get help.

Explanation: A complaint/referral process serves as a release of tension within the school community that would otherwise continue to expand as hostilities persist. The process affords school officials the opportunity to not only diffuse potentially violent incidents but to provide protection for victimized students as well.

Justification: The survey returns indicate that 45% of the schools involved have some form of referral process. At the same time, 47% of the schools surveyed have no such process.

12. Private and parochial schools should include within their school safety plans a component dealing with the vulnerability of students with disabilities.

Explanation: There is a direct correlation between the extent of disability and the likelihood of victimization of the person with the disability. The type of victimization ranges from physical harm, intimidation, bullying or alienation to more subtle tactics such as manipulation. Identifying students who are at risk for victimization because of a disability enables educators to implement intervention strategies on behalf of the potential victim and diversity training for the would-be perpetrators.

Justification: Research consistently indicates that people with developmental disabilities are more likely to be victims of violence than those without such disabilities. "... the best conservative estimate is that this population is over four times as likely to be victims... than people without disabilities." Rebecca Allen, MSA, Executive Director, The ARC of Delaware County, PA.

13. After the development of an MOU, private and parochial schools and local law enforcement should perform mock crisis situations for the purposes of evaluating its effectiveness.

Explanation: For years, schools and other entities have conducted fire drills so that, should an actual fire occur, people would be familiar with the steps they must take to avoid injury—or worse. In light of recent history with school safety, the only way to assure the appropriateness of a school safety plan is to

go through a dry run or practice. This not only familiarizes administrators, faculty and students with required actions but also gives the police, etc., insight into difficulties they may not have been aware of in their attempts to effectively respond.


Justification: As the saying goes—“the best laid plans. . .” Until such time as a plan is tried, its actual effectiveness is mere conjecture. Going through a mock hostage-taking situation, a student with a weapon, an armed intruder or a fire in the building permits an evaluation that is more “real” than theoretical.

14. Private and parochial schools should modify their typical school day so that classes begin and end at a later time.

Explanation: While there recommendations poses some very practical difficulties (busing schedules, children in the same family attending different schools, etc.), it cannot be denied that changing the school hours could be a great assistance to those students who would otherwise be at risk during what would normally be unsupervised time.

Justification: Throughout our research it became quite evident that the peak hour of violent juvenile crime is between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. In addition, statistics show that our children are at a much greater risk for becoming victims of a violent crime between 2:00 and 6:00 p.m. on school days. As we presented earlier in the facts section of our report, violent juvenile behavior between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. is more than double that between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. Additionally, this peak of juvenile crime between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. exists only on school days. On non-school days, the peak hours of violent juvenile crime are similar to that of adults and occur between 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. Yet another frightening statistic that we discovered is that research shows that eighth graders who are left unsupervised for 11 hours or more per week are twice as likely to abuse alcohol and drugs than those under adult supervision.





As it stands, typical school hours have our students arriving for class between 7:00 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. and being dismissed, depending on educational level, between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. As so many of the parents in this day and age must work outside the home to support their families, these children are often left unsupervised

Most commonly, students are unsupervised between their dismissal times, typically between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m., and the arrival of the parents to their homes after work, usually between 5:30 and 7:00 p.m. In the best case scenario, this means that students are spending about three hours each day without any parental supervision, thus totaling about 15 unsupervised hours per week. Juxtaposed with the statistic we presented moments ago, this seems to vastly increase our students vulnerability to alcohol/drug abuse, criminal behavior or becoming the victim of violent crime.

If our students were to begin classes around 9:15 or 9:30, then their dismissal time would occur between 4:15 and 4:30 p.m., thus eliminating the possibility of our children falling victim to the peak crime hour between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. Granted, one would argue that the peak hour may just alter itself to a later time frame, rather than be eliminated completely. Although we acknowledge this possibility, we believe that finding healthy alternatives/supervision for 45 minutes minimum to 2 and a half hours maximum is much easier than finding the same supervision or level of activity for the current unsupervised amount of time, between 2 and a half hours to 5 and a half hours each and every day. After implementation of our program, only the few students who are left unsupervised for the maximum amount of time will still be susceptible to the 100% increased likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse associated with unsupervised activity. Therefore, it appears that by changing the hours our schools operate classes, we can drastically lower the chances of alcohol/drug abuse amongst our children. Additionally, an increased protection from drugs/alcohol would be naturally interconnected with an increased chance of achieving school safety.